

Teaching With The Internet:
An Interview for Historical Perspective

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The Internet and World-Wide Web became classroom tools in 1995. Schools and individuals began to create web pages to communicate and share information. Commercial companies, like Classroom Connect, offered educational Webquests for classrooms all over the world. According to the *Pew Internet & American Life Project Report*, “There has been an aggressive national campaign to bring computers and the Internet into schools since 1995. The Telecommunications Act passed that year created the E-Rate program, which provided discounts of 20%-90% to schools (depending upon the number of poor children in a district) to purchase Internet access for the school or library” (Lenhart, Simon, & Graziano, 2001). The percentage of public school instructional rooms with Internet access has risen from 3% in 1994 to over 94% in 2005, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. (Wells & Lewis, 2006) How has this affected educational professionals tasked with teaching our nations children? Educational professionals, who have been in the teaching profession for more than twenty years, have seen the changes in the way instruction is delivered and the impact of internet use in the classroom with the digital natives that have grown up with the internet.

Roxanna Chism is a 26 year veteran teacher. She began her career in 1985 in Odessa, Texas as SPED Resource teacher and later taught history. Computers were being introduced when she left the district in 1995, but only as support tools for reading classes. Her first recollection of having access to the Internet was in 1999 as a teacher in Round Rock, Texas. Mrs. Chism has been a pioneer and champion of the use of technology and when it became more available, she used it to plan and deliver instruction to her students. Prior to this she reflects that a lot of paper was used and the job of teaching and managing a classroom was much more labor intensive.

Training and support for use of the Internet is an on-going issue for teachers and students. The *Pew Internet & American Life Project* provides insight into what students perceive as the ‘digital disconnect’. One area that the students recognized was that, “Students believe that professional development and technical assistance for teachers are crucial for effective integration of the Internet in curricula” (Levin & Arafeh, 2002). This is not a new perception on the issue of professional development but one that is becoming increasingly important with cuts to budgets and decreases in opportunities for professional development. Mrs. Chism reflected that Round Rock ISD placed a great deal of emphasis on being knowledgeable about the computer and were expected to perform various tasks that demonstrated proficiency, which included the use of the internet. She was offered courses on using the internet for instruction and participated in a five-day workshop, funded by Intel, that offered teachers the use of a laptop for the duration of their employment with the district (Chism, 2011). She received many of the trainings through the Round Rock district that offered employees opportunities to get training. Round Rock set goals and expectations for its employees that were assessed yearly, so Mrs. Chism felt encouraged and supported to become knowledgeable as well as proficient in her use of the Internet and technology tools available to her.

The internet is changing the way teacher prepare for and manage their classes. Everything from communication to planning has been changed by 24-7 access to the internet. The 1999 survey conducted by NCES reported the following tasks teachers use the internet for: creating classroom instructional materials, administrative record keeping, communication with colleagues, parents and students, gathering information for lesson planning to include models of lesson plans, and access research on best practices (Rowand, 2000). Mrs Chism acknowledged many of these uses as vital to her teaching practices today. Table 1 summarizes her observation.

Table 1-Use of Internet by Classroom Teacher (Chism, 2011)

Collaboration with peers	The ability to share sites and lesson plans with each other, making it more time efficient for us.
Communication with students and parents	Communication with parents by email, and by a school supported web page keeps students up-to-date. In addition, parents have access to their child's grades via the web so there are no surprises.
Lesson resources	Lessons are web quest based so advance research is essential.
Administrative Record Keeping	Grade-books are all online and managed through a Student Information System. No more hand bubbling grades. Efficiency and accuracy are much improved.
Best practices	My style of teaching has changed, gearing more towards research with the internet. Makes it easier to be a guide on the side, not a sage on the stage!

Improvement of student learning is the goal of teachers and school districts. They spend time and money to affect improvements. "Teachers who have brought technology into their classrooms are aware that it provides an opportunity to differentiate instruction and change their classrooms into dynamic learning environments" (Pitler, Hubbell, Kuhn, & Malenoski, 2007, p.2). How has student learning changed with the use of the Internet? Mrs. Chism asserts that students are able to access more information with a wider base of facts that helps improve comprehension and expand understanding. She reflects that before the internet, research was in libraries that often had limited resources. Visual representation of information was limited to movies. She feels that the use of the internet had opened up the world to students, many of which have few opportunities to travel beyond their own towns.

Student learning has also changed the role of the teacher in the classroom. "[...]technology can give students more control over their own learning, facilitating the analytical and critical thinking and the collaboration championed in the constructivist approach to education" (Pitler, Hubbell, Kuhn, & Malenoski, 2007, p. 3). Mrs. Chism feels that she is now

more of a facilitator using less direct teaching in the classroom and supporting students and their efforts with more active learning opportunities. She has incorporated more problem based learning since students have access to more information. Today she uses the class textbook as a resource for students to acquire keywords and search terms. In addition, the class text comes with access to enrichment resources and activities that are designed for use on the internet.

Access to the Internet in school is not without its issues. Schools are bound by not only laws regarding access but also the expectations of all stakeholders that school will be a safe environment free of the harsh realities of life. “Even when cost, technical, training and use, and equity matters have not been at issue, schools have faced legal, policy and ethical tensions around whether and what type of access minors should have to the Internet” (Levin & Arafeh, 2002, p.25). So the question is asked, what is required if technology is to make a difference in student learning in the 21st Century? Mrs. Chism sites that in the case of her current position, the technical aspect of connection needs to be improved. Regular instruction is frequently impeded on by the need to conserve band width for online testing. She also supports the specialization of sites designed specifically with children in mind that archive safe, reliable, relevant information.

Mrs. Chism is a veteran teacher that has embraced technology and is an advocate of its use and growth in education. She closed with these thoughts,

Some teachers have embraced technology, while others are slow to accept. Those that use the technology benefit their students by giving the students more points of view and the ability to gather and process data. This skill for the 21st Century is so important, as there is so much data coming at students, and changing data at that. Teachers who use the internet wisely can help their students become 21st Century citizens that are prepared to accept the challenges and the changes of a global society. (Chism, 2011)

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